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ASSIGNMENT CARDS

For several weeks I have been using daily assignment cards in my high-school literature classes, and the plan has proved so much more convenient than an assignment book that I am emboldened to mention it to other teachers.

Each afternoon when I plan the next day's assignments I take a card for each class, heading it with date, topic, and pages to be studied, and adding such questions, notes, or brief outlines as may help young students to prepare the lesson definitely. The next day I dictate the assignment, and then place the card on the spindle devoted to that particular class. When the lesson is recited, I write on the back of the card the names of any students who were absent, or for some other reason have to make up that day's work. When such a student returns, I hand him the card, he copies the assignment, replaces the card on the spindle, and appears at the appointed time to report on the lesson. It requires far less time and trouble to handle "back work" in this way than by referring to an assignment book. The definiteness of the plan reduces absences to the minimum, for students know that absolutely every piece of work is to be done.

The assignment cards can be used later as a basis for topical reviews. For instance, if I wish to review two weeks' work, I give the cards to ten students, allow them five or ten minutes to collect their thoughts, and then require them to give connected, topical discussions of the various pieces of literature reviewed.

In order to avoid giving the impression that I teach literature by methods of cast-iron rigidity, perhaps I had better say that many entire recitations, as well as a part of every recitation, are devoted to perfectly spontaneous reading and discussion, guided by the individual choice of the students, so that each may find in literature the thing that is his own.

It is, however, a deepening conviction with me that it pays to make assignments very carefully and definitely, so that students may have no excuse for vague and incomplete preparation.

ELIZABETH HODGSON

WORKING BACK TO CHAUCER

"With the Seniors, then, I am to begin with Chaucer and work down to the present time, but pay no attention to history or biography?" I asked my superintendent.

"Just so. But why begin with Chaucer? They aren't interested in Chaucer. Begin with the *Saturday Evening Post* and work back to

Chaucer. Lead them from what they are interested in to what you think is worth while—if you can," was his reply.

Here was an order I had been eagerly waiting for—the opportunity to teach English literature to high-school students without a textbook on the history of literature. To begin with, the present interests of the students appeared sound pedagogically. But how would reversing the processes of history work? The experiment, however, seemed worth trying.

I found the students were reading the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *Youth's Companion*, and the *Ladies' Home Journal*. A few read *Harper's Magazine*, and one in the class had read the *Atlantic*. It was with the short story represented in these magazines that I began. We discussed these stories in the light of Poe's theory of the short story, and some other bases for judging the story were given. We read representative stories from the better class of magazines, then short stories by Poe, Hawthorne, Bret Harte, Stevenson, and Kipling.

Poe furnished us the transition from prose to poetry. Poe's poetry was read and tested by his own theory of poetry. A large amount of contemporary poetry was measured by Poe's standards; then, by way of contrasting standards, Arnold's *Study of Poetry* was used. We next plunged into the poetry of the Victorian era. From this point in the course, the authors chosen were practically the same as those which would have been studied had we followed a textbook in the history of literature. The order in which authors were taken up was dictated by the library facilities, the content of the pieces of literature, or the whim of the teacher.

In June came the inevitable question from the superintendent, "How did the course go?"

My reply was: "It was hard work with so small a library as we have here, but on the whole it went well. The students liked the magazine work that we began with, and they have kept it up all year. They have come to know the writers at first hand, so we have escaped ready-to-wear criticism. But the best thing about the course, to my mind, is that the students have come actually to like good literature. They are as ready to read the *Atlantic* as the *Saturday Evening Post*."

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